

# stronger families

FOR A STRONGER GEORGIA







**Georgia Department of Human Services**  
Office of Facilities and Support Services

# **Elder Deaths:**

Hiding in Plain Sight

**Pat King, RN**

Manager, Forensic Special Initiatives Unit/FSIU  
Division of Aging Services

**WARNING:**  
**Module contains graphic photos**



# Forensic Special Initiatives Unit/FSIU



David Blake  
Financial Crimes  
Training Coordinator



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Victim Advocacy  
MDT Liaison

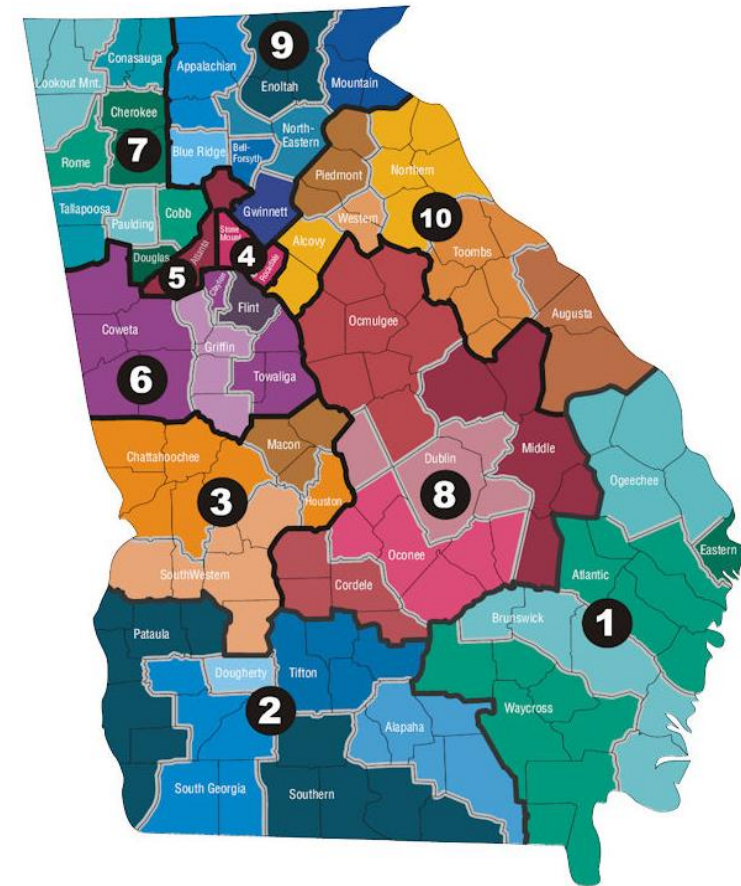


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*Georgia Judicial Districts & Circuits*



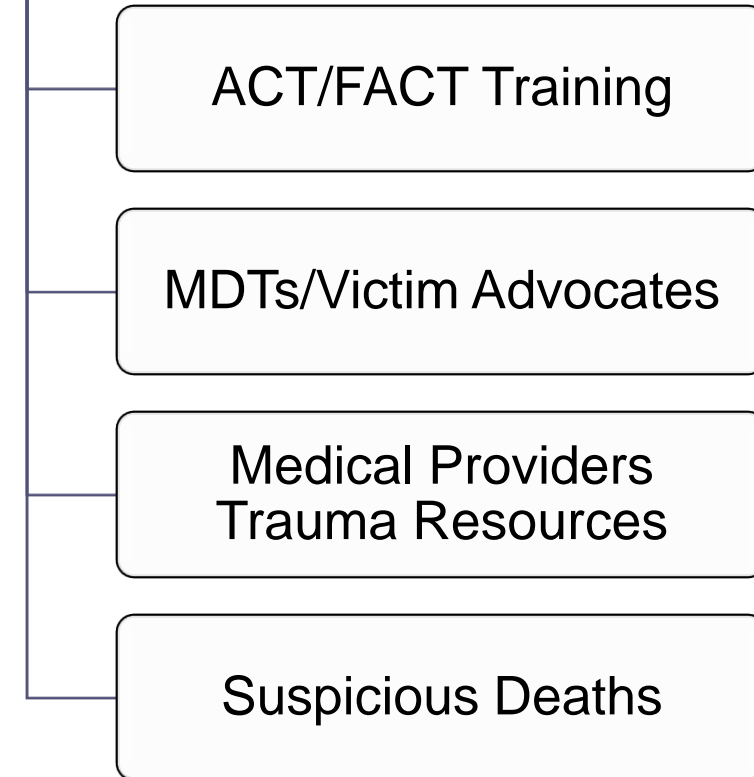


# Forensic Special Initiatives Unit/FSIU

## Supporting Those Protecting At-Risk Adults



## Priorities



# Mandated Reporters

## Child Abuse

MDs, PAs, Interns, Residents  
Hospital/medical personnel  
Dentists  
Psychologists  
Podiatrists  
RNs, LPNs  
Counselors, Social Workers  
Teachers, School administrators  
Child welfare, service organizations  
Law enforcement



## At-Risk Adult Abuse

**Anyone required to report child abuse +**

MEs  
Coroners  
Daycare personnel  
Personnel of health-related services  
Financial institutions  
Law enforcement



# Stats



# FY' 18 Adult Protective Services

REPORTS RECEIVED	INVESTIGATIONS	SENT TO LE
<b>26,702</b> (~2,777,141 ARA pop)	<b>14,417</b>	<b>5261</b>
		2734: Exploitation 914: Neglect 532: Abuse 560: Emotional Abuse 41: Sexual Abuse

GA DHS

1 in 10 adults 60+ experience abuse, neglect & exploitation.

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/elderabuse/index.html>



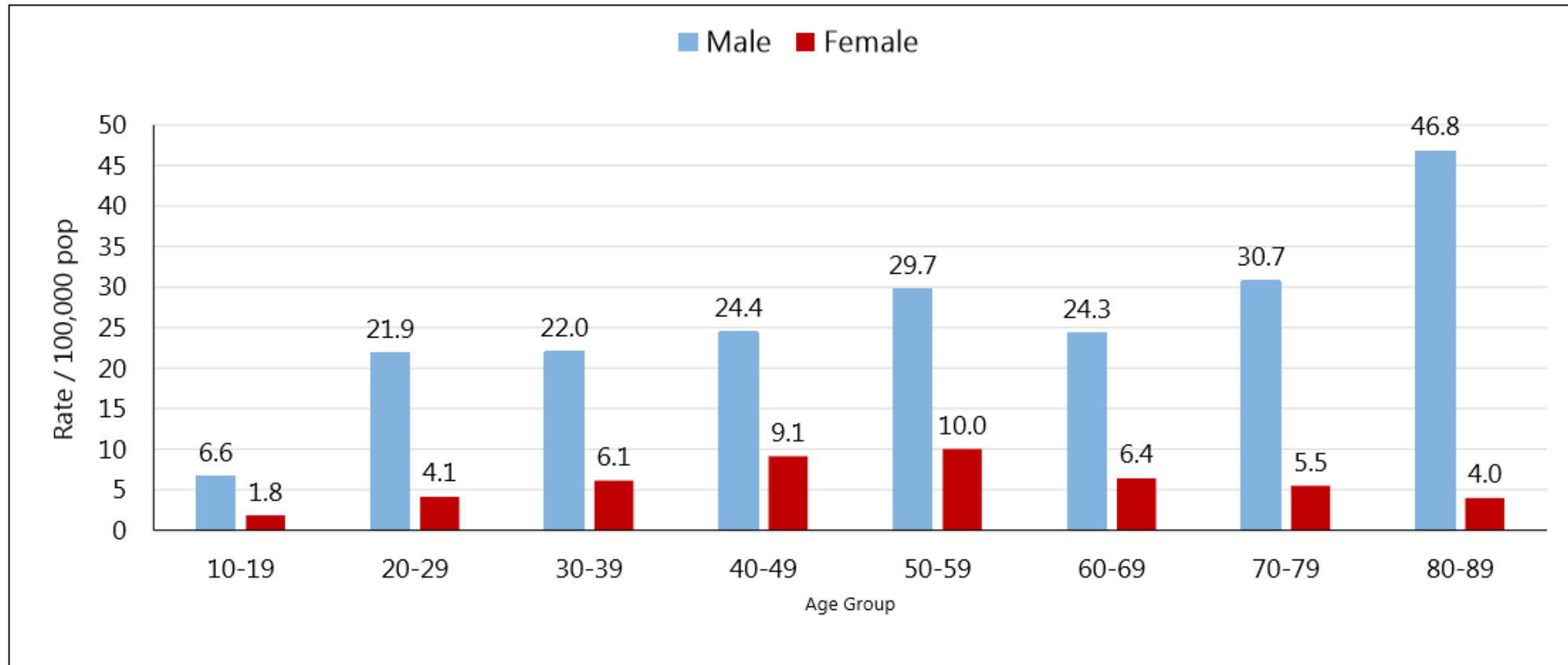


# FY' 17 Healthcare Facility Regulation

ANE LOCATION	NUMBER of INCIDENTS	SOURCE
<b>Personal Care Homes</b> 1432 PCHs/ <b>20,556</b> beds	<b>3390</b>	<b>DCH/HFR</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 237: Abuse</li> <li>• 342: Neglect</li> <li>• 112: Misappropriation</li> <li>• 300: Poor Care</li> </ul>	
<b>Skilled Nursing Homes</b> 364 NH/~ <b>40,000</b> beds	<b>5708</b>	<b>DCH/HFR</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2597: Abuse</li> <li>• 607: Neglect</li> <li>• 828: Misappropriation</li> <li>• 116: Poor Care</li> </ul>	DCH



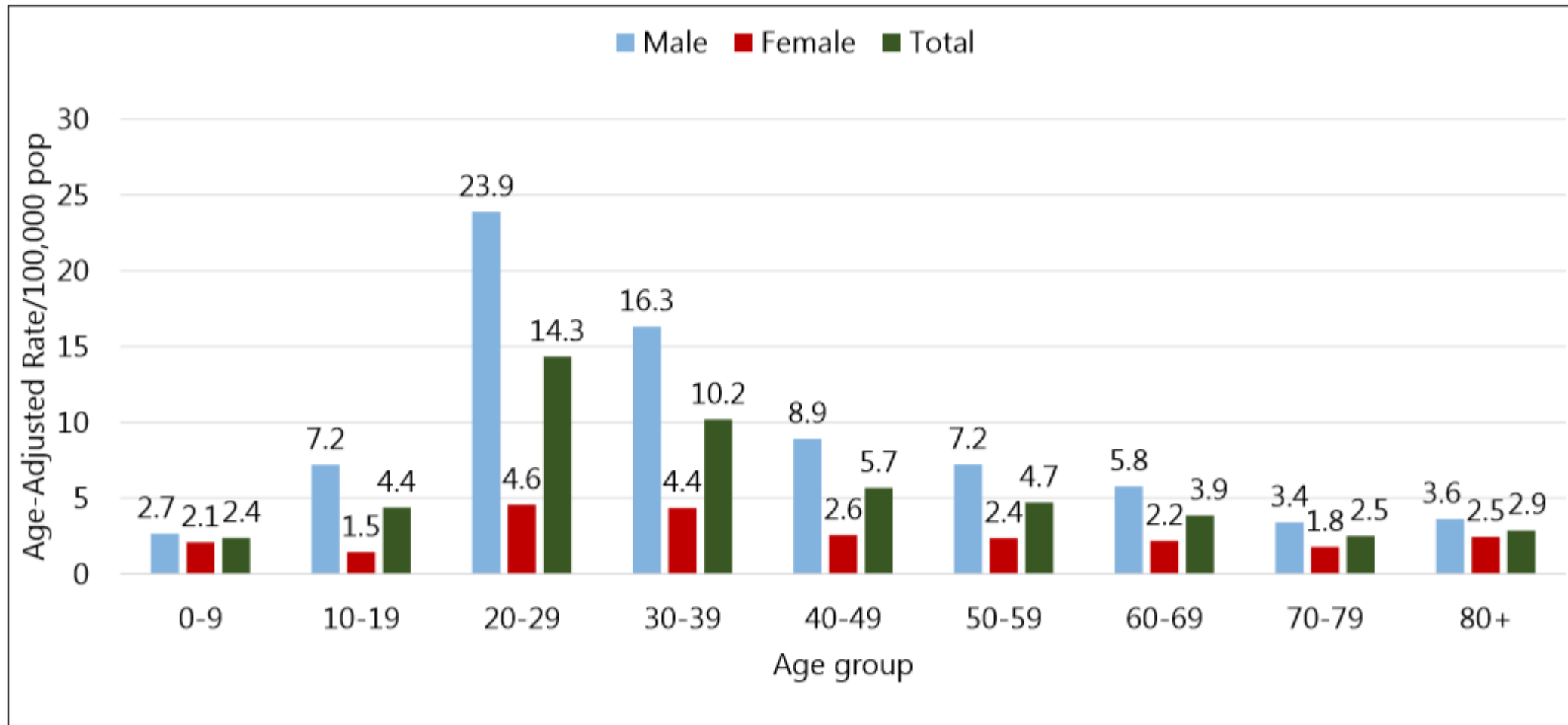
# Age-Specific Suicide Rate by Age Group and Sex, Georgia, 2011-2015.



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



# Age-Specific Homicide Rate by Age Group and Sex, Georgia, 2011-2015





# US Stats: 65+

MEASURE	NUMBER / RATE	SOURCE
Adults 65+	~50,103,812 2018 estimate	US Census
US Deaths (all causes)	~6612/100,000	CDC
US Injury Death Rate	~97/100,000	Healthy People 2020
US Suicide Rate	15/100,000	CDC
US Homicide Rate	2/100,000	Healthy People 2020
ANE Cases Reported	1/10	Nat'l Center on Elder Abuse

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

[www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218)

[www.healthypeople.gov/node/6070/data#homicides](http://www.healthypeople.gov/node/6070/data#homicides)

<https://ncea.acl.gov/whatwedo/research/statistics.html#14>



# NVDRS – Missing Data

3. Specify the relationship of victim to suspect. (When applicable) 4. What was the cause or mechanism of the injury based on the abstractor-assigned manner of death?

- ☒ All (Uncheck box to select sub-groups)
  - ☐ Spouse or other intimate partner (current or ex)
  - ☐ Parent
  - ☐ Child
  - ☐ Other Relative
  - ☐ Victim injured by intimate partner of relative
  - ☐ Acquaintance or friend
  - ☐ Rival gang member
  - ☐ Stranger
  - ☐ Victim injured by law enforcement officer
  - ☐ Other specified relationship
  - ☐ Unknown

- ☐ Standard Injury Mortality Cause Groupings
  - ☒ All injury (Uncheck box to select sub-groups)
    - ☐ Firearm
    - ☐ Cut/Pierce/Stab with sharp instrument
    - ☐ Struck by/against
    - ☐ Poisoning
    - ☐ Hanging, strangulation, suffocation
    - ☐ Fall
    - ☐ Drowning
    - ☐ Fire/Burn
    - ☐ Motor vehicle, including buses, motorcycles and other
    - ☐ Other
    - ☐ Unknown

- ☐ Firearm
  - ☒ All (Uncheck box to select sub-groups)
    - ☐ Handgun
    - ☐ Shotgun
    - ☐ Rifle
    - ☐ Other firearm
    - ☐ Combination of firearms
    - ☐ Unknown/Not reported
- ☐ Poisoning
  - ☒ All (Uncheck box to select sub-groups)
    - ☐ Street/recreational drugs only
    - ☐ Alcohol only
    - ☐ Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs
    - ☐ Carbon monoxide or other gas only
    - ☐ Multiple drug combinations
    - ☐ Other specified poison
    - ☐ Unknown drugs/Not reported
- ☐ Struck By/Against
  - ☒ All (Uncheck box to select sub-groups)
    - ☐ Blunt instrument
    - ☐ Personal weapons (hands, feet)

## Caregiver not listed

Caregivers 2<sup>nd</sup> only to family as perpetrators.

## Neglect not listed

Neglect 2<sup>nd</sup> to financial exploitation as most frequent type of abuse.

<https://wisqars.cdc.gov:8443/nvdrs/nvdrsDisplay.jsp>



# Elder Abuse:

An **act** or **failure to act** resulting in harm or threatened harm to the health or welfare of an elderly person.

## ACT (physical/sexual)



DeKalb County District Attorney

## FAILURE TO ACT (Neglect)



Walton County Sheriff Department





# Neglect

## **\*Neglect by Other**

The refusal or failure by caregiver to provide food, shelter, health care or protection for a vulnerable adult.

## **\*Neglect often the result of financial exploitation**

## **Self Neglect**

Older adults neglect their own care.

**\*Pay particular attention when 3<sup>rd</sup> party involved.**



# Financial Exploitation

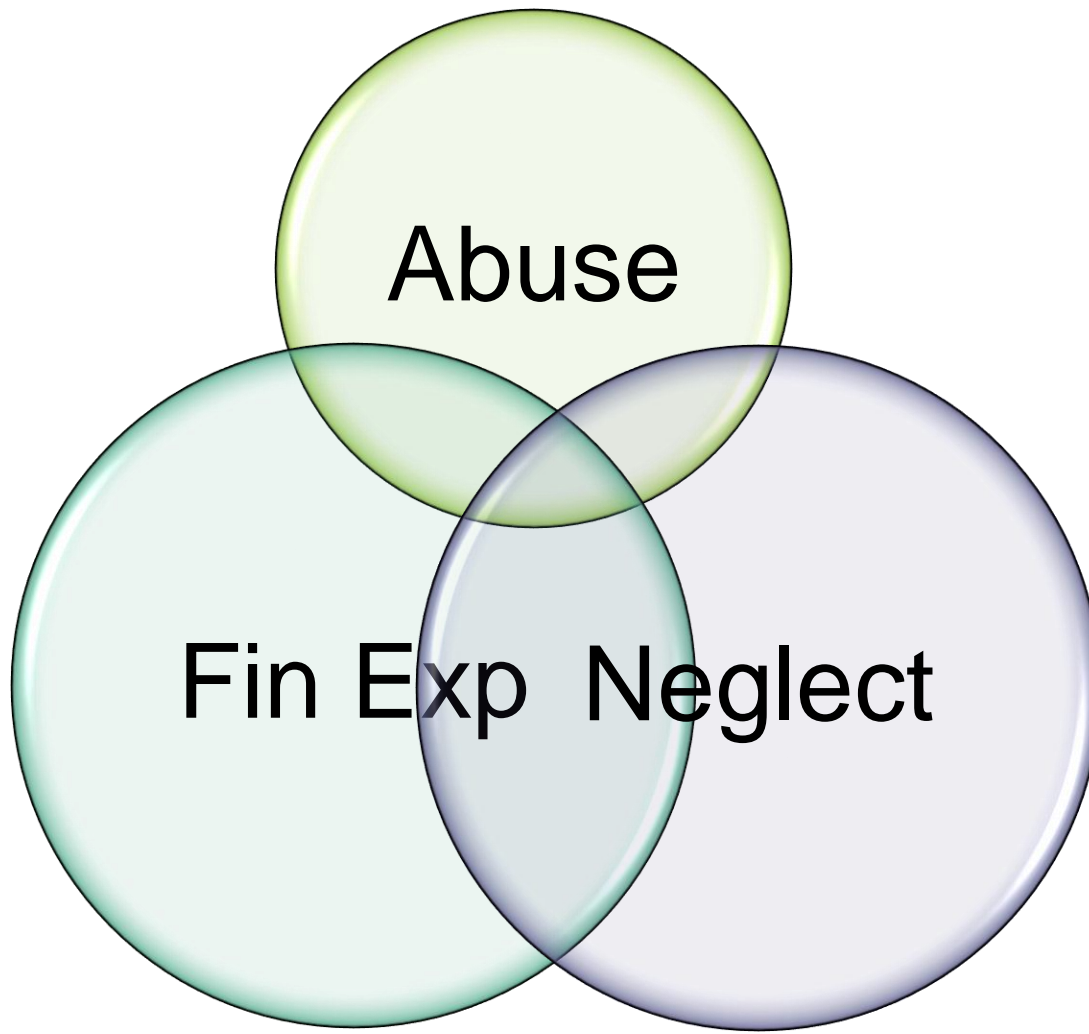


[www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com)

**90% of abusers are family members and trusted caregivers**



# Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation



Frequent overlap - Especially  
Financial Exploitation + Neglect





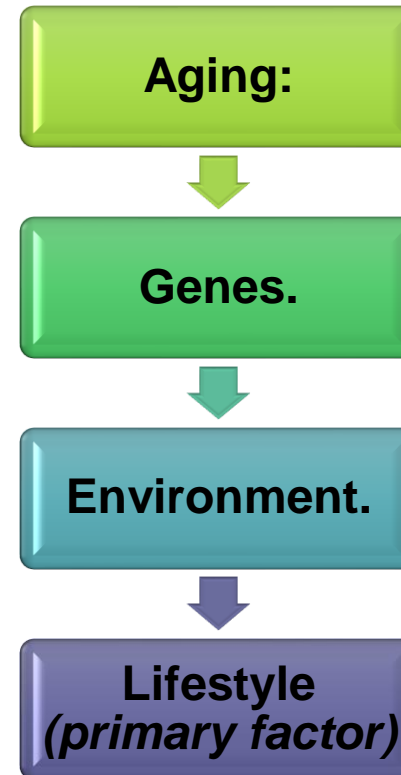
# Challenges



# Hidden in Plain Sight

## Possible Changes of Aging

- Decreased ability to recover from injury/illness
- Increased risk for:
  - Serious musculoskeletal injury from minor trauma
  - Pneumonia
  - Susceptibility to meds
  - Significant injuries with sexual assault



## Geriatric Syndromes

- Falls
  - Hip fractures
  - Subdural hematomas
- Dementia
- Incontinence
  - Untreated decubitus ulcers
  - Sepsis
- Malnourishment
- Improper medications

**Above may be mistaken for and/or may mask abuse, neglect & exploitation.**



# Hidden in Plain Sight

Changes of aging is

- Diseases
- Geriatric Syndromes
- Multimorbidity: *2 or more chronic diseases*
- Disabilities r/t combination of above
- Consequences of above changes

Add Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation to the equation

- ACEs: 6 or more can reduce life expectancy by 20 years
- Chronic Stress (Elder Abuse)
- Trauma (Elder Abuse)
  - Trauma response
- Premature Death

**Easy to assume “natural” death.  
Makes triage in the field even more important.**





# Suspicious Deaths of Older Adults



# Cause/Manner of Death – Context?

Information Needed?

Medical/Social/Financial/Functional

- Protective Services
- Regulatory Agencies
- Mental Health Services



# There Are No Do-Overs



If considering only age and medical conditions,  
**critical evidence**  
of fatal  
abuse, neglect & exploitation  
may be **missed**.



# **Homicide: Death by Other**

Can result from an **act** or **failure to act**.

**ACT**

**FAILURE TO ACT**





# State v. Whitus

*With permission of Cobb County DA's Office*



# Scene



Food Available?  
Appropriate for adult?  
Can adult access?



# Scene



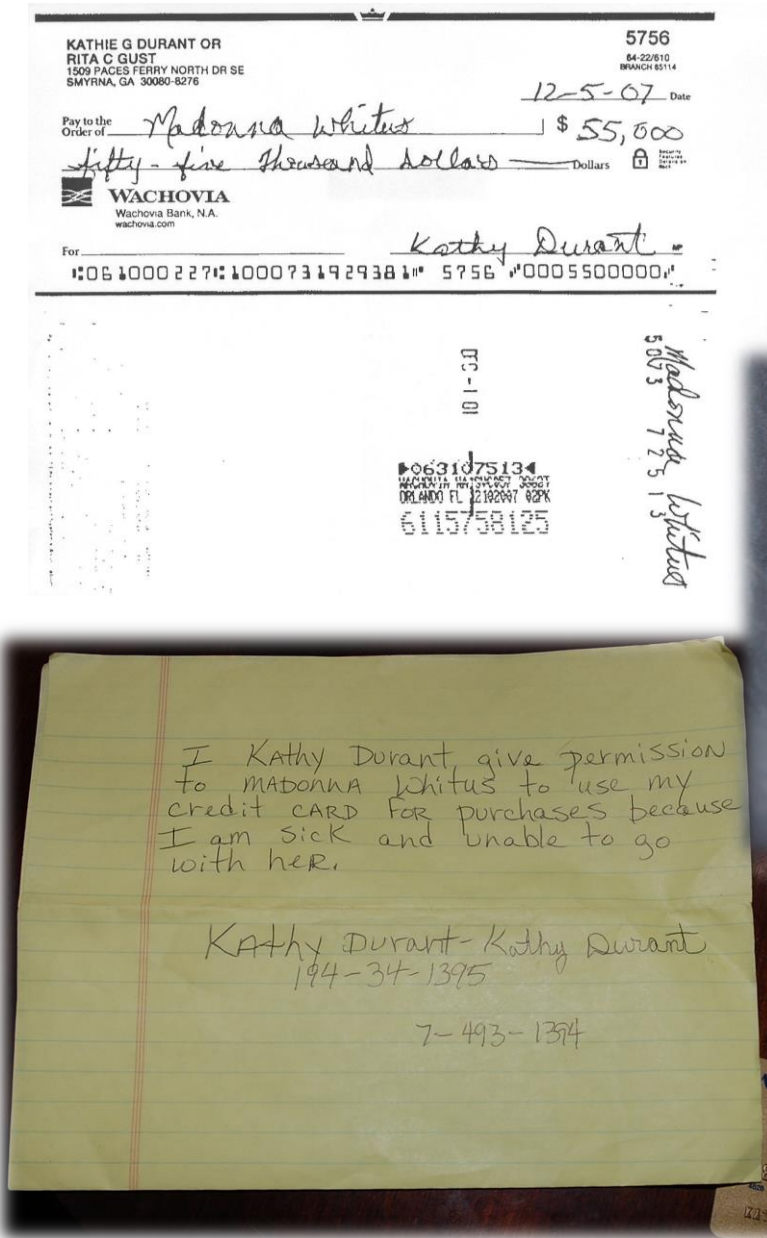
Dining & Living Room  
Full of boxes from items ordered  
online using victims' credit

# Scene





# Scene



Evidence of financial exploitation, fraud and forgery.



# Body





# Body





# Body



# AUTOPSY FINDINGS

- Heart – right ventricular hypertrophy
- Compound fracture to the right arm
- Right orbital ecchymosis
- Abrasions on both knees, left elbow, and feet
- Nondescript bruising of the body
- Bruising on lower back and buttocks



# Manner of Death: Homicide



**Cause of Death:**  
Toxic levels of Doxepin  
(Defendant's medication)



# Jury Convicts Caregiver in Woman's Death

SMYRNA, Ga. (AP) -- A former live-in caregiver has been convicted on two counts of murder in the death of a disabled Smyrna woman. <br>

Author: RitaGraham

Published: 5:05 AM EDT September 12, 2008

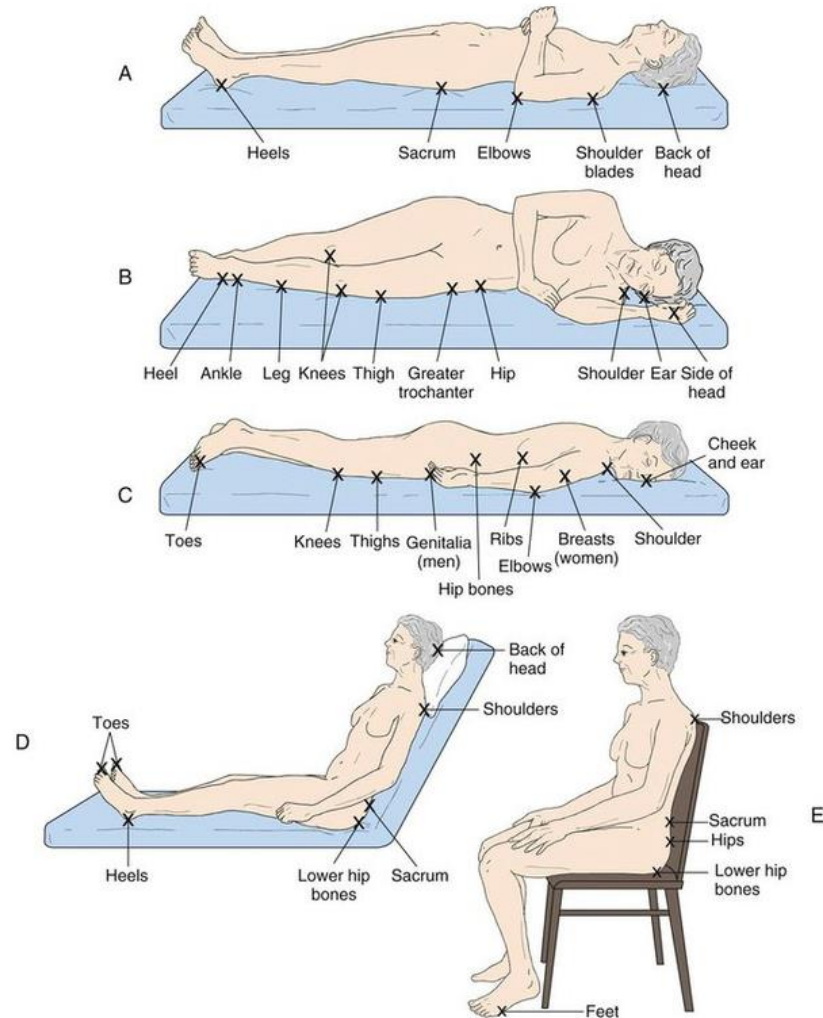
Updated: 5:11 AM EDT September 12, 2008

Sentence: Life plus 10 years



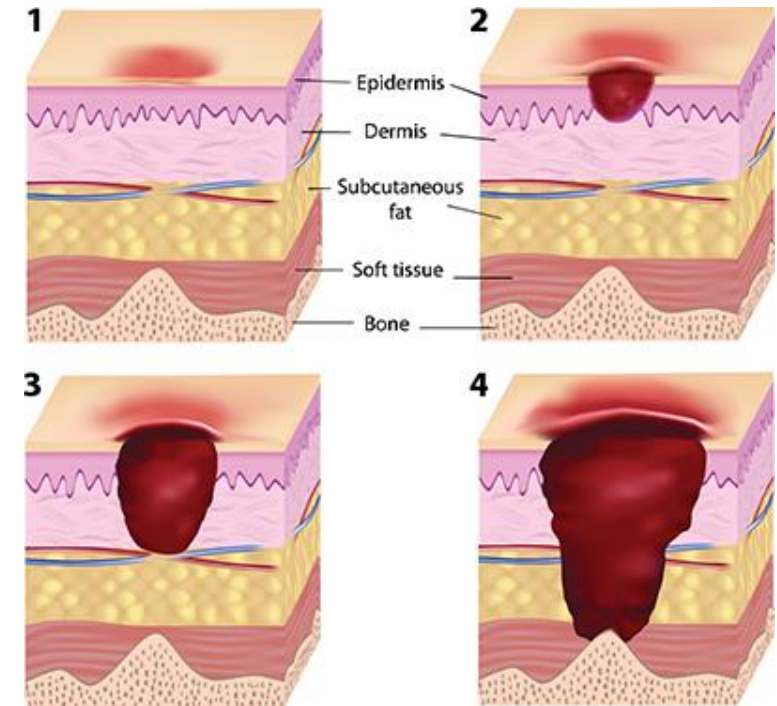
# Pressure Ulcers – Not Part Of Normal Aging

## Pressure Points



**Pressure sore:** lesion caused by unrelieved pressure resulting in damage to underlying tissues.

## Stages



<https://nursekey.com/assisting-with-pressure-ulcers/>



# Pressure Ulcers\*

Number and location on body  
Adult diaper/s  
Lying/sitting on moist surface  
Items embedded in bed sores  
Evidence of treatment and nutrition

\* *Presence of bed sore/s not necessarily proof of neglect*



**95% of Neglect victims have bed sores.**

**Sepsis, pneumonia, bone infection & death may result.**

*Elements in a Standard Elder Death Investigation, 2015*



# Mimickers





# Mimickers

Friable skin – postmortem



Kim Collins, MD

Senile Purpura



Kim Collins, MD

Skin Tears



Kim Collins, MD



# Mimickers

Impetigo



Impetigo often mistaken for cigarette burns when localized.



Impetigo often mistaken for scald injuries when infection more wide spread.

[www.aafp.org/afp/2007/0315/p859.html](http://www.aafp.org/afp/2007/0315/p859.html)



# General Considerations

Look beyond age & chronic condition/s.

Beware of preconceived opinions.

Initial approach to scene/body most important.

LE/Coroners/Death investigators are the eyes and ears of MEs.

Training on ANE to recognize environmental & external factors.



# Abuse Intervention Model

## Domain 1 Decedent

Physical Function  
Cognition  
Mental Health



## Domain 2 Trusted Other

Dependence  
Mental Health  
Personality Traits

## Domain 3 Context

*Laura Mosqueda, M.D.*



# Domain 1: Decedent

Histories: Medical, Prescription & Social

Functional abilities (self care vs needs assistance)

History with:

- Protective Services
- Regulatory Agency
- Mental Health Services



# Domain 1: Decedent

General appearance/hygiene/clothing?

Wound/disease significance always in **context**.

Medications

Neglect (malnutrition, dehydration, deprivation) as injuries.

Strangulation/suffocation may not leave marks on debilitated.

Traumatic event prior to death? (Trauma response)





# Domain 2: Trusted Other

Relation to decedent?

Power of Attorney/Guardian?

How long known to decedent?

Dependent on victim (financially, food & shelter)

Access to decedent's assets/financial accounts/legal docs?

Financial gain with death?

Stressful relationship?

Providing assistance with care?

Efforts to prevent/obstruct investigation?



State v Carr



# Domain 3: Context

Living arrangements

Injury includes harmful effect related to Malnutrition, dehydration & deprivation.

“Caregiver neglect contributed to \_\_\_\_.”

Hastened death: at-risk adults, Inheritance/financial exploitation?

Psychological component of death – e.g. ANE by trusted other.

How did decedent get to this place/in this situation?

Why didn't decedent get out (of situation, water, position, etc.)?



# Conclusions



Older adult deaths not unexpected so...

**Thorough triage at scene critical to ensure no foul play**

**3 Domains:**

- 1. Decedent/Victim**
- 2. Trusted Other**
- 3. Context**

*Many older adults die **with** their diseases not **of** their diseases.*



# Forensic Special Initiatives Unit/FSIU

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FSIU website:

[www.aging.georgia.gov/forensic-special-initiatives-unit-fsiu](http://www.aging.georgia.gov/forensic-special-initiatives-unit-fsiu)

ACT class schedule

<https://actschedule.wordpress.com>

